

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN TEAM'S PERFORMANCE AND CONSUMER-COMPANY IDENTIFICATION: USING RELATIONSHIP QUALITY AS MEDIATOR

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ABSTRACT

Background/ Objectives and Goals

There are many professional baseball teams pursue good performance to win consumer-company identification. The baseball organization would love to spend pots of money to acquire great foreign athletes to win games but keep better relationship with the fans. A team with better performance doesn't mean it has more fans than the others, when the team stops wining, fans will also stop supporting them.

Methods

Our survey test the correlation between team's performance and consumer-company identification, and take relationship quality as the mediator. 231 questionnaires were returned and descriptive statistics and regression analysis are used to discuss the correlation between team's performance and consumer-company identification.

Expected Results/ Conclusion/ Contribution

According to our research, great team's performances raise consumer-company identification, and the relationship quality has partial mediation effect. It tells that the baseball organization can't over-rely on team's performances; they should also care about the relationship quality with the fans. It makes the fans not just only acknowledge the team's performances, but also the whole team's spirit and they'll be more loyal fans.

KEYWORDS: Team's Performance, Relationship Quality, Consumer-Company Identification

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INTRODUCTION

Background/ Objectives and Goals

Taiwan Professional Baseball League is about to hit its 27th anniversary, among any other sport; people see baseball as their national sport in Taiwan. There's no doubt that baseball is the favorite sport of Taiwanese due to lots of amazing national baseball team's performance. In the 60s and 70s the national team repeatedly defeated strong competitor in senior league, and had won a champion title in 1990 Asian Games plus silver medal in 1992 summer Olympic in Barcelona.

Today, Taiwan professional baseball league had cut down to 4 teams, and each team has been working on the cultural evaluation in order to attract more of the attention and the identification from fans. Bhattacharya and

Sen (2003) think once "Consumer-Company Identification" become a trustworthy partner with their customers, the customers would become a diehard supporter to the company, and even promote the company to others. Consumers would show their identification with the company by buying products from it, or introduce its product and service to friends and relatives. When customers face with negative news that would possibly harm the company's reputation, it won't be easy for royal customers to cut off the relationship with company.

Improving the team's performance could be the most direct component to affect fan's desire to watch the game. According to Campbell, Aiken, and Kent (2004), "Winning is Not Everything; It is The Only Thing", the quote perfectly annotates the perception of "Winner takes everything!" Most people see the teams' winning percentage as an importance factor of whether or not buying tickets to the game (Pan, Gabert, McGaugh, and Branvold, 1997).

By all, it doesn't mean that there is always a positive relationship between teams-fan's identification and the team's performance. In 1981, Greenstein and Marcum had mentioned that there are about 25% of fans that could be a variation factor depends on team's performance in MLB. Even though performance is one of the main factors for fans to watch the game, the quality of games may affect the customer satisfaction. In Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990)'s study, it points out that there is a positive relationship between the salesperson interactive with customer and the possibility of future business chance business. According to Carter and Rovell's observation in 2003, from 1950 to 1970 when Bill Veeck was in charge of MLB Chicago White Sox, he found the team should put more attention and care on fan's feeling while in the game instead of causing news topic. No matter if the team in off-season or not, it's better for the team to bring surprise to their fans continuously.

Hence, this study is expecting that from fan's point of view to investigate the connection between team's performances and consumer-company identification, and verify if relationship quality is the intermediary variable.

METHODS

This study had divided into four parts: first is the study's structure, seconds is study's Hypothesis, third is study's variable in each dimension, fourth is the ways of analysis.

Conceptual Framework

The study is in accordance with background and purpose, and use team's performance as independent variable of the study, relationship quality as the mediator between team's performance and consumer-company identification. Consumer Company identification is the dependent variable of the study. As shown in fig 2-1.

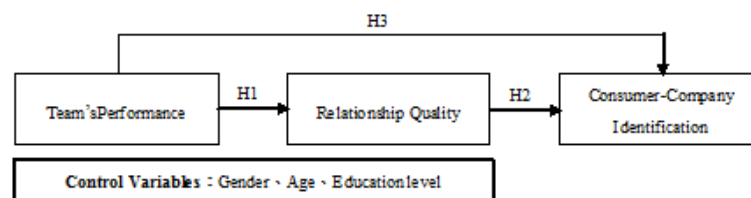


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

Theory and Hypotheses

Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, and Sloan (1976) mentions that when the sport team wins the game, the fans would automatic wear the team's merchandize to show their spirit, and try to make connection with the team. In

order to rise up the self-esteem, fans would love to show the team's victory to other people. But when the team is in the failure, in order to save the self-esteem, fans would try to clear off from the team, this is called Cutting-Off-Reflected Failure. For example, when team's performance is not well, fans would not like to show their loyalty to the team (Crocker and Major, 1989). When the team's performance is good, fans would love to show their support to the team and even do it spontaneously.

H1: Team's Performance will Positively Affect Relationship Quality between the Fans and the Team

Gladden, Irwin, and Sutton (2001) point out that professional sport team should not only focus on the short term profit but should apply the strategy to create a long term profit. When selling goods and services, relationship quality could be apply by salesperson attitude to reduce the consumer's insecurity (Crosby et al, 1990). Tellefsen and Thomas (2005) has a similar thought, if the enterprise can enhance the promise and relationship with it's customers, it would greatly rise up the relationship quality. Gao, Yoon, Frisbie, Coles and Clark (2008) have the same perspective, because there was a positive relationship with company, customer choose to shop there again. When relationship quality is improved, it would reduce the fan's insecurity to the team.

H2: Relationship Quality also Positively Affect Consumer-Company Identification

The former owner of New York Yankees, George Steinbrenner's quoted, "Winning is the most important thing in my life, after breathing. Breathing first, winning next." He even quoted Douglas MacArthur's quotation, "there's no substitute for victory." Kinnard, Geckler, and DeLottie (1997) use MLB as their main sample in their study, they found that the more victory of team, the more fans would wear team's merchandize. Cialdini et al's research shows that the fans would wear anything that is related to the team spontaneously to show their loyalty. So as we can see, "victory" is an important factor to attract the fans to watch games, when team's performance is good, the fans would love to connect themselves to the team and acknowledge the team.

H3 : Team's Performance Positively Affect Consumer-Company Identification

Methods and the Definition of Study's Variable

According to the conceptual framework of the study, the following is the operational definition of each study's variable and the explanation.

Team's Performance

The accumulate teams' stats would be a positive assessment to the team, the better the stats is, the more fans would support them. This study adopts Wann, Tucker, and Schrader (1996) measurement, using Likert scale to score, from 1-5 stating very disagree, and to extreme agree.

Relationship Quality

The relationship quality had points to when fans are at the game, the subjective feeling created by the interactive with the employee. This study adopts Smith (1998) come out with the level of satisfy, trust, and promise dimension to evaluate relationship quality. Also adopt Krist of, Gaby and Dawn (2001)'s measurement, using Likert scale to score, from 1-5 stating very disagree, and to extreme agree.

Consumer-Company Identification

This study define consumer-company identification as teams and fans build up a long term relationship together by promoting the teams to nearby people, and do no harm to the team. This study adopt Mael and Ashforth (1992)'s measurement, using Likert scale to score, from 1-5 stating very disagree, and to extreme agree.

Control Variables

In order to pure the relationship of consumer-company identification between team's performance and relationship quality, we use gender, age, and education level as control variable.

Information Collect and Analytical Method

Samples

In this study, we used Web questionnaires to investigate fans watching CPBL games in Taiwan to see the effect between team's performance and consumer-company identification. We took fans of the four teams in CPBL as the object for the study. The questionnaires were issued on 2015/10/13 and collected on 2015/11/23 anonymously. Total recovery of 240 copies, 231 valid questionnaires, and the effective response rate was 96.25%.

Analysis Method

In this study, we used SPSS 21.0 statistical software for analysis. Analysis methods are as follows:

- **Descriptive Statistical Analysis**

Descriptive statistical analysis of demographic variables in the study of samples to analyze the subject's personal circumstances and characteristics (such as: support team, gender, age, education level, Profession, Income per month, Years of watching CPBL, Frequency of watching games (through TV, the Internet and etc.), Frequency of watching games in the stadium, whether know the events held by pellets, how many times the pellets hold the events, how many times you participate the events, whether you're attracted by the merchandise, average cost of merchandise and what if there's a chance to change your support team. We conducted distribution analysis frequently and commented on the sample structure.

- **Reliability Analysis**

Reliability analysis shows the stability and reliability of research Questionnaire, and showing the equivalence measure results. When using multiple items to measure the specific dimensions, we have to test whether they have internal consistency, stability and well-equivalence which mean the item and measure results have internal consistency. The higher index indicates higher reliability. Therefore, this study measures three groups of individual to see whether the results have internal consistency and Cronbach's α coefficient is viewed as a measure of the reliability of the study.

- **Regression Analysis**

Regression analysis mainly explores the relationship between independent variable and dependent variable, and measures changes in the mathematical equation between the variables. The study used regression analysis to explore the relationship between team's performance and consumer-company identification and verify the existence of mediation effect in relationship quality.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

The analysis of demographic variable shown in Table 3-1

Table 3-1: The Analysis of Demographic Variable

		Number of People	Percentage
Gender	Female	96	41.6%
	Male	135	58.4%
Age	20 years old and below	70	30.3%
	21~30 years old	103	44.6%
	31~40 years old	51	22.1%
	41~50 years old	6	2.6%
	Above 51 years old	1	0.4%
Education level	Junior high school and below	12	5.2%
	High school	41	17.7%
	College	148	64.1%
	Graduate school and above	30	13.0%
Profession	Manufacturing	31	13.4%
	Service Industry	41	17.7%
	Finance& Insurance	6	2.6%
	Business	13	5.6%
	Industry	6	2.6%
	Military, public servant and teacher	19	8.2%
	Self employed	9	3.9%
	Technology	11	4.8%
	Student	90	39.0%
	Others	5	2.2%
Income per month	20,000 dollars and below	77	33.3%
	20,001~30,000 dollars	22	9.5%
	30,001~40,000 dollars	35	15.2%
	40,001~50,000 dollars	49	21.2%
	50,001~60,000 dollars	22	9.5%
	60,001 dollars and above	26	11.3%
Years of watching CPBL	A year and below	16	6.9%
	1-3 years	61	26.4%
	4-6 years	29	12.6%
	7-9 years	27	11.7%
	Above 10 years	98	42.4%
Frequency of watching games (through TV, the Internet and etc.)	Rarely	7	3.0%
	1~2 times a week	45	19.5%
	3~4 times a week	61	26.4 %
	4 times a week and above	118	51.1%
Frequency of watching games in the stadium	Rarely	57	24.7%
	One time per month	90	39.0%
	Two times a month	47	20.3%
	1 time~3 times a week	30	13.0%
	4 times a week and above	7	3.0%

RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

The study used Cronbach's α coefficient to view the internal consistency and stability of each variable, question on the questionnaire and measurement result. The greater correlation between variables means the better consistency and stability. When Cronbach's α coefficient <0.35 , it's classified as low reliability and shouldn't be accepted. When $0.35 < \text{Cronbach's } \alpha \text{ coefficient} < 0.7$, it's classified as middle reliability. When Cronbach's α coefficient >0.7 , it's classified as high reliability.

Table 3-2: The Reliability Analysis Chart of Each Questionnaire

Reliability Analysis	Team's Performance	Relationship quality	Consumer-Company Identification
Cronbach's α	0.902	0.939	0.889

Source: Classified from the study.

As shown in table 3-2, the study's Cronbach's α of all variable are all greater than 0.7, so the questionnaire of the study has enough internal consistency.

Hypothesis Test

In order to test the correlation between "Team's Performance" and "Consumer-Company Identification" and also make sure "Relationship Quality" is a mediator among them, we use regression analysis in our study. To make the analysis more precise, we investigate the information by putting them into four models. We summarize test results whether the hypothesis is tenable from the result of the study in Table 3-3-5.

Model 1: We put control variables "Gender", "Age" and "Education level" into independent variables and put "Consumer-Company Identification" into dependent variables. Results show that "Gender" is not significant to "Consumer-Company Identification" ($\beta = -.091$). "Age" negatively affects "Consumer-Company Identification" ($\beta = -.207^{**}$). "Education level" is not significant to "Consumer-Company Identification" ($\beta = .054$). As shown in Table 3-3-1.

Table 3-3-1: Regression Analysis between Control Variables and Consumer-Company Identification

Independent variables	Dependent variables (Consumer-Company Identification)		
	B	β	p
Gender	-.131	-.091	.168
Age	-.179	-.207	.005**
Education level	.054	.054	.450
Pattern Abstract			
R^2	.052		
Adjusted R^2	.039		
F	4.121		

* : $P < 0.05$ ** : $P < 0.01$ *** : $P < 0.001$

Model 2: We put "Team's Performance" and three control variables "Gender", "Age" and "Education level" into independent variables and put "Relationship Quality" into dependent variables. Results show that "Team's Performance" positively affects "Relationship Quality" ($\beta = .723^{***}$). "Gender" is not significant to "Relationship Quality" ($\beta = -.075$). "Age" is not significant to "Relationship Quality" ($\beta = .048$) "Education level" is not significant to "Relationship Quality"

($\beta = -.039$). As shown in Table 3-3-2.

Table 3-3-2: The Regression Analysis of How Team's Performance and Control Variable Affect Relationship Quality

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables (Relationship Quality)		
	B	β	p
Team's Performance	.765	.723	.000***
Gender	-.110	-.075	.112
Age	.043	.048	.353
Education level	-.040	-.039	.445
Pattern Abstract			
R ²	.528		
Adjusted R ²	.520		
F	63.190		

* : $P < 0.05$ ** : $P < 0.01$ *** : $P < 0.001$

Model 3: We put "Relationship Quality" and three control variables "Gender", "Age" and "Education level" into independent variables and put "Consumer-Company Identification" into dependent variables. Results show that "Relationship Quality" positively affects "Consumer-Company Identification" ($\beta = .626^{***}$). "Gender" is not significant to "Consumer-Company Identification" ($\beta = -.016$). "Age" negatively affects "Consumer-Company Identification" ($\beta = -.178^{**}$) "Education level" is not significant to "Consumer-Company Identification" ($\beta = .018$). As shown in Table 3-3-3.

Table 3-3-3: The Regression of How Relationship Quality and Control Variable Affect Consumer-Company Identification

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables (Consumer-Company Identification)		
	B	β	p
Relationship Quality	.606	.626	.000***
Gender	-.022	-.016	.760
Age	-.153	-.178	.002**
Education level	.018	.018	.739
Pattern Abstract			
R ²	.436		
Adjusted R ²	.426		
F	43.746		

* : $P < 0.05$ ** : $P < 0.01$ *** : $P < 0.001$

Model 4: We put "Team's Performance" and three control variables "Gender", "Age" and "Education level" into independent variables and put "Consumer-Company Identification" into dependent variables. Results show that "Team's Performance" positively affects "Consumer-Company Identification" ($\beta = .572^{***}$). "Gender" is not significant to "Consumer-Company Identification" ($\beta = -.055$). "Age" negatively affects "Consumer-Company Identification" ($\beta = -.132^{*}$) "Education level" is not significant to "Consumer-Company Identification" ($\beta = -.022$). As shown in Table 3-3-4.

Table 3-3-4: The Regression Analysis of How Team's Performance and Control Variable Affect Consumer-Company Identification

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables (Consumer-Company Identification)		
	B	β	p
Team's Performance	.586	.572	.000***
Gender	-.079	-.055	.311
Age	-.114	-.132	.026*
Education level	-.022	-.022	.710

Table 3-3-4: Contd.,	
Pattern Abstract	
R ²	.371
AdjustedR ²	.360
F	33.306

* : P<.05 ** : P<0.01 *** : P<0.001

Table 3-3-5: The Summary Sheet of Hypotheses Verification Result

Code	Hypothesis	Test result
H1	Team's Performance will positively affect Relationship Quality between the fans and the team.	Supported
H2	Relationship Quality also positively affect Consumer-Company Identification.	Supported
H3	Team's Performance positively affect Consumer-Company Identification,	Supported
Source: Classified from the study.		

According to the results of hypothesis test Table 3-3-5. The result of hypothesis indicates that team's performance will positively affect relationship quality between the fans and the team, relationship quality also positively affect consumer-company identification. Because team's performance positively affect consumer-company identification, relationship quality is a partial mediator. The study will describe and discuss the result of hypothesis analysis in detail in the next section, and will derive the fact that relationship quality is a partial mediator.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

The result of the study indicates that team record positively affects consumer-company identification, Relationship quality brings in mediation effect. As the result shows that team's performance would affect consumer-company identification. After all, no fan wants the team, which they favorite, to lose the game. But relationship quality is a part which can't be ignored. When fans are satisfied with the services and the activities in the field, they will trust the team gradually and become loyal to the team.

Practically, the result of the study reminds the teams that they can't pursue victories blindly without concerning about relationship quality between fans and the teams. There's more harm than good if the fans feel they're not being treasured. Team's performance would absolutely affect consumer-company identification, but without relationship quality's assist, recognition from the fans can only be established when the team's record is outstanding. Therefore, the team shouldn't put too much emphasis on team's performance to attract fans' attention. They should take more efforts on maintaining relationships between fans and the team so as to decrease their worries and uncertainty.

Though the study finds some meaningful results, we still have some improvements on study methods. For example, we refer foreign scholars' research to set questions on the questionnaire, there may bring some mistakes on translation and expression of the words; Moreover, about 39 percent of examinee are students, this may affect examinee range of the study; At last, this study is a cross-sectional study, we can't track opinion of these questions from the same examinee in the future, so it lacks of comparison on the time axis.

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